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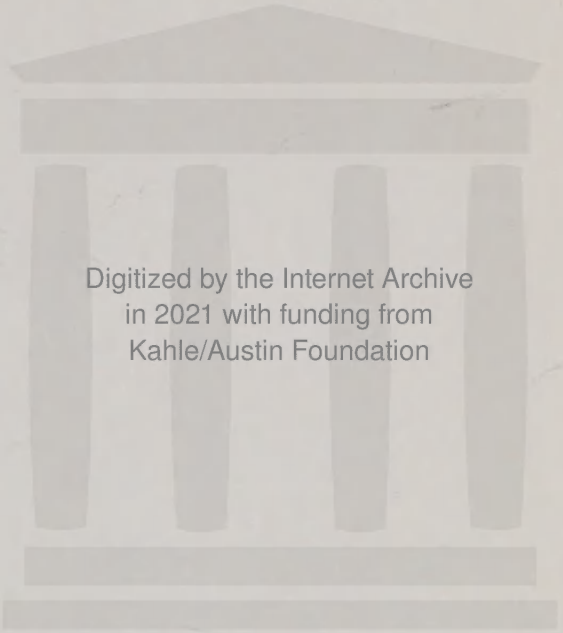

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MAY I GO TO THE THEATRE?

BY

REV. J. MACDONALD, A.M.,

LATE MISSIONARY TO INDIA.

"METHINKS as in a theatre I stand,
Where vice and folly saunter hand in hand;
While virtue, hovering o'er the unhallowed room,
Seems a dim speck through sin's surrounding gloom."

NEW-YORK:

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF EVANGELICAL KNOWLEDGE,

NO. 11 BIBLE HOUSE, ASTOR PLACE.

1857.

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THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF EVANGELICAL KNOWLEDGE,

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John A. Gray,
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MAY I GO TO THE THEATRE?

At a farewell entertainment lately given at Calcutta to a well-known amateur and friend of the theatre, various speeches, in honor of each other and of their common cause, were made by the parties present.

One of the speakers, on that occasion, was not satisfied with strengthening his own position and encouraging his own men; but with true military boldness, stole out in the midst of his speech to the enemies' camp, and threw into it an old-fashioned hand-grenade; after which daring and perilous attempt he speedily returned to his topic and toast, with an apology to his associates for the questionable digression he had made. The following is the combustible left among the enemy. The explosion will follow, and its effects be speedily seen:

"I am delighted to see such a strong array of intelligence and talent, so many men of eminent position, and of unquestionable moral social worth, as congregate around this board, openly and publicly

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repudiating (as they virtually do by their presence,) what I and they too, I am confident, can not but consider as the 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' notions of the opponents of the drama, who are but too often pleased in their courtesy, to designate a theatre, by the elegant and classical appellation of '*the House of Satan!*'"

Now we are not going to intermeddle with the sincerity of the speaker's "delight," of which we have no doubt, nor with the "strong array of intelligence and talent" which then listened to his words, nor with that "eminent position" which some of those present occupy, nor with the "unquestionable moral and social worth," which decorated that theatrical board, nor with the solemn "repudiation" of the "cribbed, cabined, and confined notions of the opponents of the drama," pronounced in so "open and so public" a manner, as was then and there done, by so many of the speaker's fellow-guests; nor are we going to intermeddle with the charge of "courtesy," and of using "elegant and classical designations," brought against a certain class of men, who, when they *must* choose between *two* things, prefer sincerity to courtesy, truth to elegance, and the Scriptures to the classics; not because they despise or even neglect the latter, but because they prefer the former, when they can not have both. But we purpose rather to notice for a little this special charge, that the opponents of the drama give to the theatre the designation of "*the House of Satan.*" We confess ourselves opponents to the drama and the theatre, however insignificant, un-

influential, and unknown that fact may be; and we have been led to consider the public charge brought against us, and to institute a self-inquiry. How far we have found ourselves guilty, and on what grounds we must so plead, will be set down in this tract; and as we are anxious, even as others, to extend and fortify the views which we entertain, especially when they regard the honor of God and the welfare of man, we give them as they are, to the world of friends and foes. The "strong array of intelligence and talent" opposed, only encourages us; because it will connect an interest with our subject which no ability and no effort of ours could ever communicate.

The term really employed by the parties referred to is the "*Synagogue* of Satan." The reason for their using this term, whether just or no, is at least obvious. It was meant, that as men met together in a synagogue of old to serve God, so also by meeting together in a theatre, men served Satan, only with this difference, that whilst they met consciously and avowedly to serve the one, that is, God, they met unconsciously and only virtually to serve the latter, that is, Satan. Because some men, therefore, believed the theatre to be a house of assembly, favorable to the interests of the great enemy of God and man, they gave it the name, justly or unjustly, of the "Synagogue of Satan." However, the term "House" being still more generic, comprehensive, and descriptive of permanent and domestic character, may perhaps be considered as more appropriate; and to this we need not object, as it may also extend our field of proof.

There are many opponents of the theatre who are *not* in the habit of using this particular designation. There are not a few *worldly* men who consider it to be a place where evil predominates over good, and who never permit their sons or daughters to visit it, save it may be once or twice, to satisfy curiosity, and to prevent an inflamed imagination; yet these men would not use this offensive designation, chiefly because they do not believe in Satan's agency or personal operation; yet do even they give it Satan's character, for they call it "*evil*" and "*ruinous.*" There are also many *religious* persons who do not habitually use the terms "Synagogue or House of Satan;" not because they disbelieve Satan's existence or influence, or his connection with every evil thing that is done, but because they have an habitual dislike to the use of quaint or strange religious terms in common intercourse with the world. They think that when used unnecessarily, such words have a tendency to excite prejudice without any counterbalancing benefit; and therefore in all ordinary circumstances they use words equally expressive and less offensive, if they possibly can. Therefore, if the speaker of the speech referred to, were to live for a whole year amongst the class of Christians of whom we now write, he probably would not hear the terms "Synagogue or House of Satan" once used, although he would hear many things said against the theatre, as a place of present evil and future ruin.

But whilst we have no particular objection to part with a particular and arbitrary term, on the ground

of mere courtesy, yet we will not surrender it when it becomes a point of attack, or a matter of peremptory demand. Ground that may be rejected for parade or encampment, may yet be selected as a field for battle. A word indifferent for the household may yet be a decided watchword, by which in a moment to know our own; and so, many Christians may choose not to surrender this short, comprehensive, and most scriptural way of describing an evil and ruinous system. As Christ said to the Pharisees, "Ye are of your father the devil, for his works ye do," even when they boasted of piety and morality; so may they also say of the theatre, it is the "House of Satan," IF there are his works done, and his words spoken, even though called by others, "a guardian of public virtue."

Now, in acting so, we are not without a precedent in the very world that condemns us; nay, even the *gentlemen* (we use the term sincerely and not ironically) of the world here go beyond *us*. In the most fashionable part of the world's metropolis, the St. James's of London, there are certain resorts where nobles and commoners, or all who please, may and do gamble for money with cards and dice—where estates are lost or won in a night; and what are these very places called—(not by "saints and Methodists," but by the friends of the drama, by magistrates, editors, grave senators, and fashionable novelists—what, but HELLS! Now, what does the Lord Jesus Christ say of hell, (and what does any man know of it, but from Him)? "Everlasting fire prepared for the devil and

his angels!" Yet who complains? None. We know that if we be wrong, the world's precedent will not justify us; but this we believe, that the world should purge itself of slang, before it accuse us of cant: and if it boldly call a gambling-house a "*Hell*," it must excuse others for thinking that the theatre possibly may be a "*House of Satan*."

One other circumstance we would here advert to, and it regards a matter of fact. Is it not true, that on the stage the *devil is personified*, and so appears for certain dramatic ends? Is there not a certain operatic drama, yea, are there not more than one, in which the Evil One or a demon, bears his part for public amusement in the theatre? If, then, on the stage, the legitimate stage, there be the personification of *Satan;* and if, as we know, the theatre be the only place where he is thus introduced for the enjoyment of men, surely the only house in which Satan is represented might be exclusively termed his "House!" Where men are pleased to see his image, there surely, we are warranted to say, he must delight to be. If the one be a fact, the other is an inference; and if it be not offensive to set up his form, why should it be so deadly to attach his name?

After these general observations on the whole matter, we must proceed to something more specific, and will endeavor to state some particular reasons why certain opponents of the drama may have considered the theatre as at least a "*House of Evil*," leaving to any who please to attach the other and more

emphatic name to it, whenever it may seem useful and necessary.

In order to prevent misapprehension and cavilling hereafter, we lay down certain things which are granted. Some plays are better than other plays, and there may be a very few comparatively pure. Some actors are better than other actors, and a few are in private life comparatively moral men. Some theatres are much worse than other theatres, so as to be comparatively outcasts even from their own class. Some audiences are more select than other audiences, so that the same amount of evil may not be tolerated by them as by many others. Some spectators may go to the play from mere curiosity, and not from satisfaction; and therefore they are not to be called playgoers. Some performers may be amateurs, and therefore may be free from some professional evils, although they may have others as great; and some qualities may characterize a whole mass, which may not be found in every single part. One thing more we add, that we are of course now writing for those, who hold the Bible to be the word of God, and therefore *supreme* in all judgment of human affairs. He that admits not this, is of course an infidel.

1. The theatre *rejects*, or must reject *the word of God as the standard* of character by which to test the drama. There is in England a chamberlain of the stage. Now, suppose that he were to intimate that no play would be licensed until it was ascertained that in its character it corresponded with the spirit of the Bible, and that it was regulated in all its parts by

the requirements of the revealed will of God; how would such an idea be laughed at, and how utterly would it be scouted and rejected by the theatrical world! How would men say, "Every thing in its place; what has the Bible to do with the drama?" True, what has the drama to do with that book? Let them who have tried it tell us, whether the Bible would be tolerated as the law of the stage; and whether the friends of the theatre do not consider strict Bible religion as inimical to their peculiar interests.

2. The *presence of God* is not recognized on the stage. He is present there continually, as witness and judge of all that is done and said. His eye is on every actor, and his ear hears every word of evey play that is performed. But *there He* must not be recognized, although he is known to be present; *there* prayer would be an insult, and devotion a mockery; and were any man to ask, is this for the glory of God? they would tell him, this is no place for canting, whining, and hypocrisy! Alas! what is that place to be called, where God's immediate presence dares not to be welcomed, and where it would be contrary to strict convention that men should acknowledge their Father's face? It may be said, that this is true of other places also. So it is; but that does not alter the fact now before us; it only aggravates it, by showing that the stage is but *one* development of a huge system of evil. The Bible says: "Whether therofore ye eat or drink, or *whatsoever ye do, do all to*

the glory of God." Does this include the stage, or does it not?

3. *Religion*, meaning by that *personal piety*, which consists in a strict compliance with the whole word of God, is ridiculed on the stage. There are some plays, as there are some novels, in which religious characters under a caricatured form, are introduced for laughter and ridicule. Such are plays introducing puritans, covenanters, or methodistical persons, men (as a class) of holy lives, righteous characters, and ardent piety. There are also many plays in which most evident contempt is thrown upon holiness of life, under the grand cant-term of "sanctimoniousness," and in which any peculiar strictness in keeping the commandments of God is sneered at as "hypocrisy," that convenient term by which wicked men often mean only this, "We don't understand it, we utterly hate it, we cannot believe it, we must therefore deny it, and so we do; it is all hypocrisy." How often even are manly simplicity and female purity made a subject of ridicule on the stage! and the actions of those who are young and untutored in evil, brought into view for laughter and merriment! so that even what may be called "the religion of nature," affords food for farce and comedy. No doubt the battery is masked; but yet it is seen, known, and marked. The last dramatic generation concealed nothing of all this spirit; and if there is less of it manifested now, let it not also be forgotten that the drama itself has been sinking. It can not now do all that it could when princes secretly married from the green-room, and

nobles married from the stage. "Methodism" is to the stage what water is to the dog that is mad. Hatred of a man is shown in the love of his caricature; and he that hates piety will delight to laugh at its representation.

4. *Sin is made a subject of merriment* on the stage. This is the life of comedy and farce. Lying, swindling, cheating, intriguing, coveting, seducing, those sins which bring down the wrath of God on this world, are made in the actings of a play subjects of most exquisite amusement; and that which in hell is the cause of eternal agony, is, on the boards of a theatre, the occasion of convulsive laughter! There is for instance a play in which the interest is kept up by a character who incessantly *lies;* and this is accompanied by the merriment of the spectators. Now, suppose the curtain of eternity to drop at that moment, and the judgment to be set, and these words (Rev. 21 : 8) to be uttered, "All LIARS shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone!" Yea, and (22 : 15) "whosoever loveth a lie!" Suppose this, and then judge for the safety of that stage! The very sins for which the Son of God shed his blood on the Cross of Calvary, are represented with peals of laughter on the stage! Alas! too, that those who sacramentally receive the symbols of that death, can also sit in the laugher's chair and join in such awful merriment at SIN!

5. *Crime is represented,* in all its details, for amusement, gratification, and gain to the actors. The works of the devil, as murders, duels, assassina-

tions, poisonings, massacres, are acted over again, in semblance, as near as possible to the original crime. Death even, the curse of sin, and the most awful event in the universe, is the very life of Tragedy; men imitate death for money or for pleasure. Murder, suicide, execution, varied forms of the awful sentence of this poor sinful world, may be seen acted by the highest talent, and by the tenderest sensibility. Strange, that innocent minds should love to imitate guilty actions—that moral men should delight to personify the wicked—that the tender virgin should love to see the representation of a foul murder—that the meek matron should go to witness the enactment of jealous and deadly revenge! Yet so it is; crimes which, if real, men would shudder at and abhor, they go to see, as a matter of pleasure and taste, when artificially represented. Would a primitive martyr have acted the part of Nero? Would Stephen have performed the part of Pilate or Barabbas? Would an angel consent to wear the mask of Satan? Would Enoch personify Cain, to amuse an assembly of sinners? The mind shrinks from the principle involved in such suppositions; and feels that to trade in the personification and representation of sin, is inconsistent with that purity of spirit which would shrink from even the "appearance of evil." To be endeavoring to realize the passions of the wicked, and to be studying their evil expressions, is an art from which the disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus must ever shrink, as from sin itself, in a most subtle form.

6. In the theatre there is the habitual *profanation*

of the name of Almighty God. No doubt, men swear elsewhere; many men swear wickedly from passion, or from habit, and even from contemptible vanity; and all this is wicked, very wicked. But such profanation of God's awful name is a part of the histrionic art. Men *study* to swear; they study when and where an oath, or what sort of an oath may be used. The number of oaths, the class of oaths: the slang oath, the natural oath, the peculiar oath—all these are considered. Tragedy must have a magnificent profanation; Comedy must have a fashionable profanation; and Farce claims for itself the unrestricted right of arbitrary and varied profanation—only with this guiding principle, that the most ludicrous form of profaning God's name is the best! Therefore men say by rule, "*Good God!*" "*Lord have mercy!*" "*By God!*" "*God!*" "*Gad* or *Egad!*" just as may suit their taste or convenience! Yea, the name of Jesus is blasphemed by such men, and they will introduce a national character, swearing, "*By Jasus!*" Why? because it is laughable to hear the name of the Crucified One *so* pronounced! Is it said in reply, "This evil does not belong to the stage essentially?" We say it does; as a matter of fact, it does; can you tell us of a stage where there is no profanation of God's name allowed—and it does as a matter of *theory* also—for if the drama is to include a representation of human sins, then as it would be faithful to its principles, it *must* represent the sin of swearing also. And so it faithfully does represent all sin that the world will tolerate—this is its *sole* limit.

7. The *name of Satan* is a favorite household word on the stage. It is a favorite oath in the theatre; it is the actor's pet-oath in Farce. It assumes such forms as these, "what the devil!" "the devil you do!" "the devil is in it!" "devilish good!" etc., and many such forms as caprice or aught else may dictate. Thus whilst God's name is dishonored, by a profane introduction, the name of Satan is coupled with it, and promoted from its foul disgrace—and men who can not endure the devil's name to be connected with the whole, do yet themselves associate it with all the several parts. There is something inconceivably low in adjuration by Satan—and the place in which such language is familiar, is one in which the true Christian will seek that his feet may never tread. Who dares trifle with Satan's name, but the man that can trifle also with Satan's end and Satan's home? If the stage conduce to morality, it seems certain that men should use the name of Beelzebub to cast out Beelzebub, and that profanity of language will conduce to purity of life!

8. The proper *distinctions of sex* are broken up on the stage in order to meet exigencies, or in order to produce certain dramatic effects. Men there often lay aside their manliness, which is their glory, in order to demean themselves as women—and women lay aside their womanly glory, in order to demean themselves as men; so instead of men and women, we have before us female-men, and male-women; than which nothing can be more disgusting. Even the ancients abhorred a Claudius in women's raiment:

and in our own private society such disguises would be utterly abominated. But we have higher testimony than that of man in this matter. What saith the law of God? "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all that do so are *abomination to the Lord thy God!*" This last clause shows the commandment to be of moral and perpetual obligation. Men may laugh at this if they will; but the laugh of a reasonable being is an act for which he is accountable to God; and it were better spared, when its ground is not sure. This evil may be called an incidental one—but one thing is certain, that it is considered as most necessary, and most legitimate, in what are called the purest of all theatres, *amateur-houses*, or in private theatricals.

9. The *degradation of woman* is another most serious evil connected with the stage; and it is undeniable as it is serious. The world itself is judge on this point, and is a severer judge than even the Christian would be. As a general rule, an actress is an outcast from society; she bears a doubtful character and a suspected name. A few masculine or strong-minded women are able to outlive and to bear down much of this feeling on the part of society; but even *they* feel, that their professional life is most unnatural for a woman, and that it is inconsistent with the full exercise of those peculiar sympathies and domestic enjoyments for which they were made. Who amongst us could endure to see wives, daughters, or sisters, pacing the public stage to gratify the eyes of

the multitude—embracing or being embraced by hireling strangers—or representing without a blush or a falter, the varied words and phases of a sinful or even of a lawful love—or standing forth in pace and action to imitate the characters of guilty murderers, or of abandoned paramours? And shall we be so narrow and so selfish as to countenance and applaud that in our sisters of womankind, which we would abhor and reject in sisters of our own? Is not this the law, "To love our neighbors as ourselves?" and is it possible that we can do this, when we patronize the degradation of womankind upon the public stage? There is just one worse condition than even this in society; when in any case the known harlot or avowed mistress is publicly supported, and openly countenanced on the stage by *her own* sex—and when female sin is supported by female contributors. This is about the last degree of public virtue. The influence of able and popular actresses is great; and if it be for evil, subtle indeed but tremendous is that evil. The green-room contains many secrets not safe to be told; but autobiographies and secret memoirs have divulged much, and jealousies and rivalries have told more. The matter is now well understood, and it is well that it should be outspoken; whatever degrades woman, ruins the world, and destroys souls—as the sin of Eve can tell to the end of time.

10. Who ever heard of *piety on the stage?* Who has heard of a pious actor, or a pious actress, or a pious manager, or a pious amateur? We have heard of a religious lawyer, of a religious physician, of a

religious painter, of a religious sculptor, a religious merchant, a religious musician, and a religious editor —but who can tell us of a religious tragedian, a religious comedian? Let him that *can* declare it. Would not men think that we mocked, were we to ask—was Garrick a man of prayer? did Kemble follow Christ? did Siddons serve her Redeemer? was Macready a man of Christian zeal? did Miss Stephens delight to sing the praises of Him who is the Saviour of men? And yet these are amongst the *best* we can name. Piety is scarce everywhere, and amongst all men—but why is it never expected and never believed to exist on the stage? But what mean you by piety? some will say. We open the Bible and find the following account of it: "Blessed are the poor in spirit —blessed are they that mourn—blessed are the meek —blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness—blessed are the merciful—blessed are the pure in heart—blessed are the peace-makers—blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake." Is such piety as this compatible with a stage-life? Can it exist in the *man*, seeing that it would not be tolerated in the *play?* Select one portion of true piety—the observance of the *Sabbath.* Is there amongst actors, any known respect for that holy day? How much of it is spent in the committal of parts, and in rehearsals of the whole? How many agents of the theatre attend the house of God, to pray to him or to praise him? Where is the actor's pew? Where is the actress's seat? An exception there may be—but alas! how rare! For ourselves, we have read,

and heard, and known of many players, amateur and professional, here and elsewhere—but why is it that we never heard of any that was supposed to love the honor of his God, or the honor of his Saviour, above the profits and pleasures of the stage? Why? because, we boldly say, *scriptural* piety *can not* breathe in the air of a system so essentially ungodly, and necessarily irreligious; or in a place where God is disowned, and sin ridiculed, where the moral law is daily broken, and the gospel of grace is unknown as the standard of professional life.

11. The average *character of theatrical attendance*, bears testimony to the understood and conventional character of the stage. We speak now of the mass of those who are regular or perpetual play-goers—not of those, who may visit it but seldom, and who by that circumstance show that they do not much esteem it. Is the youth who nightly frequents the play, trusted by his worldly master, in proportion to the frequency of his attendance there? Does a virtuous man admire and prefer as his wife, the woman who is never absent when she can help it, from the play? What class of the rich habitually occupy the boxes, and most devotedly patronize the play? Let West-end tradesmen say—let Tattersall and Crockford tell. Do you want the scum of vicious poverty? you will find it in the gallery. Do you want the froth of vicious mediocracy? you will find it abundant in the pit. Do you want the cream of aristocratic pride, vanity, and scandal? you may select it in the boxes. What inhabitant of the great metropolis, that knows

the world, doubts this? Let a register be taken on a bumper-evening of the real moral worth that crams the play-house—if such a thing were possible, and would the friends of the theatre hail the criterion? The supposition is enough. Why does the swindler love the play? Why does the gambler love the play? Why does the forger love the play? Why does the horse-jockey love the play? Why does the scoffer at religion love the play? Why does the backslider from the worship of God love the play? Why does the man that never prays love the play? Why does the apostate love the play? Why do fashionable swearers love the play? Why do shameless adulterers love the play? Why do married courtezans love the play? Why do embezzling clerks love the play? Why do those that never enter a church love the play? Why is it, in short, that all the very worst classes of society, provided they have money, delight to frequent the theatre? Why do they feel it to be a home for the spirit? Is it because it is so good, or because it is so evil? The fact is undeniable, that the closest attendance in the theatre is from the least moral part of society; and it is equally certain that such persons go there only for pleasure. That there are moral persons who also go there on select occasions, we admit; but it is undeniable that actors do not expect their benefits from them—they would distrust their largest payers, and be ashamed of their best attendants.

12. How many *ruined young men* date their first steps in ruin from the time when they began to fre-

quent the theatre! They were at first comparatively pure and free from open or decided vice; but play-going completely altered their habits of thinking and acting. The victims of imagination all day, the victims of fascination all night, their minds have become intoxicated, debilitated, and unfitted for the active duties of life. This vitiated state of mind prepares them to become the prey of the toper, the scoffer, the harlot, the gambler, the embezzler, the gentlemanly beggar who lives by constant borrowing, and the gentlemanly friend who lives by constant lending. The youth becomes intimate with the swearer, the Sabbath-breaker, the infidel, and the liar; with these he meets, and spends his hours of rest, and money more than his own. Midnight hours, restless slumbers, noon-day stimulants, a weakened body, a jaded mind, neglected work, a doubted character, suspected honor, unpaid debts, offended friends, a lost situation, all come in train of the play-house, where first he learned to laugh at sin, to take pleasure in the imitative representation of human iniquity. This fact is so well known, that no merchant would appoint as a confidential money-clerk a youth whom he knew to be *addicted* to play-going; he would consider the temptation to evil too great for him to withstand; and he knows that play-going never stands *alone* when it is habitual. How many young men, or men once young, are now tossing and heaving to and fro on the billows and breakers of town-life, who call the theatre their first seducer, no one would believe, unless from circumstances he has been compelled to see

it. It is told of an ingenuous youth, that after a struggle he prevailed over his better self so far, as to find himself at one of the entrances to a play-house; but to make sure, he raised his eye to the transparency that hung over the avenue, and read these words, "*The way to the Pit!*" The PIT! the PIT! flashed upon his mind, and remembering earlier days and better feelings, he hurried back to his home, he fled from the "PIT." Men may say this was weak and foolish, be it so; there is a folly that is better than wisdom—a weakness that is better than strength; for it is written, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men; for things that are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things that are not, to bring to naught things that are." The word "PIT" saved a youth from ruin! Go, ask the merchants of our large cities about these things, and let their counting-houses and banks be our witnesses; if "*saints and Methodists*" are not to be believed, go ask the WORLD!

13. The theatre, existing as it does, by the preponderance of evil in society, must of necessity *continue to be evil*—so that its principle of vitality is EVIL. If the principle of the stage be a turning of human evil, either by tragedy or comedy, into a subject of personal representation for human amusement: if in order to effect this, we must have a class of men who shall endeavor to throw their whole soul into the working of evil, in the inward passions, or in the outward actions, for the purpose of exactly imitating these for money, pleasure, or fame: if it be further necessary,

that such men be so familiarized in mind, to such ideal evil in all its forms, as that they shall be able to imitate any crime or represent any tolerable form of vice, with minute accuracy and much applause: if it be further necessary, in order to complete the whole, that an audience be secured who are prepared to be amused, even to laughter, at comic representations of vice, and to be entertained, even to ecstasy, by the tragic imitation of crime: and if, once more, it be necessary that theatrical play-writers should have all this present to their minds, and therefore should lay themselves out for the devising of scenes and acts, and pieces and dramas in which such an audience may be entertained, even to laughing, or weeping over vice and crime: if all this be essential to the system, (and we maintain, as we have shown, that it is,) then do we maintain that the whole system is intrinsically EVIL—its *principle* is evil. We admit that there is occasional good mixed up with it; but the good is made to serve the evil, as Christian slaves were made to serve Algerine or Turkish masters. If some good were not mixed with the stage, it could not stand at all. It is the little good that is in it that makes its evil nature so dangerous. It is the decent character of a few actors that obtains social toleration for the many. It is the comparative morality of some plays that forms an ideal protection for the rest. But the evil is evil still, and it is all the worse in its effects and its nature, because it affects and perverts the good. The evil is popular, and not the good; and so long as the stage lives by evil, it

must itself be necessarily and essentially evil. Even as Christ hath said, "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? A good tree can not bring forth evil fruit; *neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*"

14. We have much more to say on this subject, but we forbear, on account of our limits, and the patience of our readers. We might further suggest, or rather state, as proofs of the evil of the stage, the many painful *admissions* and humbling narrations made by actors themselves,—the constant *apologies* which are being made on public occasions by the friends of the stage, not of a bold and positive, but of a timid and negative caste—the direct and almost unvarying *instinct* of soul which has ever determined the most spiritual Christians to shun and oppose it—and the actual *experience* of all those who at one period of life loved the stage and made proof of its pleasures, but who afterwards were converted by the grace of God to an opposite course of life, and who, therefore, having tried both courses, are best entitled to be heard; we might have made use of all these, and some more, it may be, but we forbear. The writer, from various causes, is not unacquainted with some of the realities of this subject. He once loved the theatre, and sought the play. He felt its power; but was mercifully saved from its effects. He that saved him was CHRIST, to whom his life is now given. The writer is not giving way to theory, nor indulging in censorious fiction. He says, because he has seen and known, that the theatre is an evil. It may

be said, that this arose from the peculiar badness of his own heart: be it so. His heart was bad—very bad; but *here* lies the question again in its turn, "Why did so *bad* a heart find such delight in the *play-house?*" Why was it, that when he cared least for the Gospel, he loved most a comedy of sin? Why, when he felt not the cross of Christ, did he feel entranced by a tragedy of represented crime? Why was it that at the time of evening prayer, he preferred the gross swearing and contemptible foolery of a silly after-piece? Why did he then love Shakspeare when the Bible was neglected? If others despise or dread such questions, he does not, he dares not: the answer is simply this, an evil heart loved an evil place; and a deceived heart was willing to believe, for the sake of a temporary pleasure, that evil was good, and that good was evil!

15. Men and brethren, fellow-professors of the religion of Christ, why waste ye your precious, invaluable time on *tragedy*, *comedy*, *farce?* Behold *who* are at our doors—*death*, *judgment*, *eternity!* How shall we meet them? Shall tragedy meet death, and comedy meet judgment, and farce meet eternity? Why shrink ye? Why are ye angry at our words? Or why do ye scorn them? Should a man live where he would not wish to *die?* Should a man live in that in which he would not wish to be *judged?* Should a man live for that from which he would not wish to pass into *eternity?* Is this wisdom—is it religion—is it safety? The pious Hervey once travelled in a stage-coach with a lady, who was speaking of the pleasures of "the

play." "Pray, what are those pleasures?" said he. "They are three, sir. Pleasure before the play in anticipation; pleasure during the play in its enjoyment; and pleasure after play in retracing it." "You have omitted one more pleasure yet to be realized, madam," Hervey calmly replied. "What is that, sir?" "The pleasure which the retrospect of the time so spent, and the things so seen, will afford you when laid on a *death-bed!* She felt the truth, turned to God, and left forever the theatre to those who cared not how they may die. But a greater than Hervey hath said: "Rejoice, O young man! in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; *but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment!*" Let us then take heed to all that we do, for of it all we must give account. Managers, actors, actresses, amateurs, auditors, spectators, and writers for the stage, must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall receive according to the merits of that stage, through all eternity, according as they are good or evil in the sight of God. Let him, then, that is in doubt, and who would not pass from the *stage* to the *judgment*, no longer tread its boards, or witness its scenes, lest he should find at last *that* was at least a "House of Evil," which the opponents of the drama called a "House of Satan."

We have now fulfilled a duty which we had hoped and expected to have seen performed by abler and wiser hands. But time is short, and in such cases

there is a limit to waiting. There is a tide of iniquity, in the largest class of society, forcing its way to an extent little credited by those whose attention is directed exclusively to their own immediate circles of intercourse and guardianship. Even persons who have made a profession of religion, are falling away to an extent that some do not suppose, and will not now believe. But a few more years will make it sadly manifest. Many are growing up into irreligion, dissipation, and gross immorality; and soon crime will be superadded. The *élite* of society is cultivated, the mass is given up to sin. Theatres will soon have EVIL enough to live upon. Amateurs will cease, and mere actors and actresses (as is even now begun) will take their place, and on *them* there will be no check but the acceptance of an evil population.

We well know what is to be expected for writing as we have done—anger from some, hatred from others, indifference from a great many, and attention from a very few. But all we say is, TRUTH can never be destroyed, oppose it who will; and we can only regret that it suffers more from weakness of defense than from any strength of opposition. If, however, it should appear in any measure to be true—that the theatre rejects the Bible as the standard of character by which to test the drama—that the presence of God is not and can not be recognized upon the stage, such an act being inconsistent *there*—that personal piety is often made a subject of ridicule *there*—that sin, in comedy, is made a subject of merriment—that in tragedy, crime is represented, and criminals

are personified, for pleasure and for gain—that on the stage there is the habitual profanation of God's holy name—that *there* also the name of the devil is used as a household term—that the proper distinctions of sex are broken up on the stage—that woman is degraded *there*—that piety on the stage is unknown—that the average of theatrical attendance is evil — that the neighborhoods of metropolitan theatres (where open) are of the worst possible order—that many do actually date their first ruin to their attendance *there*—and, that from the very nature of the case, the theatre living by evil must continue to be evil—if we have shown all these evils imperfectly and partially; or if any portion of them is shown to be true, then have we done enough to enable us to say to those who accuse us of *uncourteousness*, in calling the theatre the "House of Satan"—"Why beholdest thou the *mote* that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the *beam* that is in thine own eye?" "Go," say we, "go, cast out that BEAM of evil that is in thy play-house, that it be not a house of sin, and then bid us part with the little uncourteous *mote* in our words."

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